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SUBJECT: ANXIETY TRUMPS HOPEFULNESS OVER TURKEY, NAGORNO
KARABAKH, AND GREAT POWER MOTIVES

Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (C) Recent initiatives by Turkey and Russia to bolster their respective roles in brokering peace between Armenia and its neighbors have caused significant media speculation -- and suspicion -- regarding the resurgence of the region's "two heavyweights." While reflecting divergent views, the media ferment reflects Armenians' unease and ambivalence about negotiations with Turkey and over Nagorno Karabakh (NK), and especially of any linkage between the two. While GOAM officials and pro-government media have tended to push a more positive line on these issues, other political parties and commentators often have not. Armenians' public reaction to the prospect of dramatic new moves on Nagorno Karabakh have betrayed more anxiety than hope. Armenian media, lacking much direct information from their own government, widely report Turkish and Azerbaijani news and comment, with over-heated speculations added to the mix as "analysis." This hothouse environment often causes Armenians' fears and conspiracy theories about the "real" motives and hidden agendas of neighbors and larger powers to eclipse rational assessment of the obvious benefits that rapprochement will bring them. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

THE TURKEY DYNAMIC -- NK AND "GENOCIDE"

12. (U) Many Armenian media have reported on Minsk Group Co-Chair comments related to Turkey's Caucasus regional platform initiative. EUR DAS Matthew Bryza was quoted by all major media outlets stating, "Turkey's initiative is very constructive and both Armenian President Sargsian and Turkish President Gul took a political risk and displayed courage." However, many newspapers noted a belief that the continued activities and the format of the Minsk Group might be uncertain. Haykakan Zhamank, 168 Zham and Novoye Vremya claimed that Bryza's regional visit was "aimed at negotiating the Minsk Group's future status" and quotes the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan as expressing hope that the Minsk Group will be able to continue its activity "in its current format."

13. (U) Many media have covered the growing public debate about the potential for establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey and whether preconditions need to be met. All press reported that while Armenia suffers economically from closed borders with Turkey, both the President and Foreign Minister have stated that Armenia "can't take steps either today or tomorrow" that fail to take into account the events of 1915. FM Nalbandian felt it necessary to declare publicly to journalists that whatever Armenia's progress in its Turkish relations, Armenian policy would always favor support of the goal of international genocide recognition. Giro Manoyan, a foreign relations spokesman for the nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (a member of

the governing coalition), said November 6 that Armenia would jeopardize the new U.S. Administration's recognition of "Armenian genocide" if it agrees to a Turkish-Armenian historical commission. "If a commission or sub-commission is formed to discuss the genocide issue as a result of Turkish-Armenian negotiations, it is obvious that the recognition of the genocide by Obama or anybody else may be called into question."

¶4. (SBU) Opposition Heritage Party leader Raffi Hovhannissian also highlighted "genocide" recognition as a high priority, and hinted at a view we have detected elsewhere that Armenia should make no decisive moves on Turkey or NK until the next U.S. Administration takes office. He asserted that "We have reason to hope that Obama's administration will open a new century not only with respect to recognition of the Armenian genocide, but also other issues like Armenian-American cooperation, Turkish-Armenian relations, and even the U.S. position over Nagorno Karabakh self-determination."

¶5. (SBU) Media anxiety and speculation have grown fretful in recent weeks, after Turkey's rumored plan to invite the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents to Ankara to work on settling Nagorno Karabakh. Many Armenians see Turkey and Azerbaijan as two sides of the same coin, so a trilateral summit would be seen by most Armenians as the Turkic side ganging up on Armenia two-to-one. After word leaked in Turkish press, and from there into Armenian press, of a GOT proposal to invite the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to Ankara to work on NK settlement, President Sargsian

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responded in his November 6 joint press conference in Brussels with European Commission President Barroso that Turkey cannot act as a mediator in the NK conflict, proffering as rationale that this would violate the Minsk Group format, which had just been upheld by the Moscow Declaration.

NK ANXIETY MORE PRONOUNCED

¶6. (SBU) As new progress seems within reach on a Nagorno Karabakh deal, politicians and analysts of various stripes have made innumerable comments to weigh in on the matter. Most have reiterated what they consider non-negotiables for Armenia. Many have called for NK to have a direct role in the talks, with a number criticizing the Moscow Declaration for characterizing the conflict as bilateral between Armenia and Azerbaijan. A number of commentators and politicians opposed returning any occupied (many Armenians say "liberated") territories to Azerbaijan. Many also reiterate their demands that NK must never be returned to Azerbaijani sovereignty.

¶7. (U) Radio Liberty cast doubts on the Moscow declaration when it reported that although Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have "pledged to intensify the protracted search for peace," they "stopped short of announcing any concrete agreements." The report further noted "the lack of specifics in the declaration is construed by some observers as a sign that a breakthrough in the Karabakh peace process is not on the cards." Azg, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, Haykakan Zhamanak, and Respublika Armenia also noted on November 7 that while "Nagorno-Karabakh Foreign Minister" Georgi Petrosian stated that the "declaration adopted by Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents testifies to the readiness of the Russian Federation to act as an effective mediator in the Karabakh conflict settlement," according to Petrosian, the process of negotiations during the last years showed the need to involve representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh directly. The papers reported that Petrosian added that if Azerbaijan is "really interested in a settlement," it should have sat down with Nagorno-

Karabakh representatives a long time ago, "instead of trying to put pressure on Nagorno-Karabakh through different international institutions and countries and misleading the international community."

¶18. (U) Former Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian obliquely criticized the Armenian president, in a widely reported interview with RFE/RL, for failing to win language in the Moscow Declaration renouncing the use of force in the NK conflict, the very indirect reference to the Madrid Principles, and other issues he felt important for the Armenian side. He said "I have no doubt that Azerbaijan will take advantage of that."

¶19. (U) Aram Safarian, parliamentary faction leader of the governing coalition member Prosperous Armenia, welcomed the Moscow declaration in a November 7 press conference, but said that any NK settlement must be based on three principles:

1) NK cannot be part of Azerbaijan, as it has earned the right to its independent statehood over the past 15 years; 2) NK must have a land border with Armenia; and 3) the people of NK must have an internationally-guaranteed right to live in and build their "country." On November 14, Safarian affirmed the value of the Minsk Group, while commenting "I strongly believe that Armenia should stick to its principles during the talks."

¶10. (U) Another ruling coalition member party, the highly-nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaks), has also stepped up its rhetoric opposing the Minsk Group's Madrid Document, and has threatened to leave the government if

such a settlement were signed. Aghvan Vardanian, of the ARF Bureau, emphasized that Turkey cannot be a mediator in the NK conflict. If Ankara wants to help, it can only do so by pressing Azerbaijani to be more flexible. Giro Manoyan told a press conference October 27 that "discord is caused by the fact that some coalition members are ready to sacrifice lands which were not comprised in the original Artsakh (NK) territory, while we have no intention of giving up any lands that are part of Artsakh." He said the only acceptable peace settlement would be one that enshrines the current status quo. He also called for immediate Armenian recognition of NK. "We cannot wait for Azerbaijan's decision for 40 years."

¶11. (U) ARF party leader, Hrant Markarian, told RFE/RL November 12 that the Dashnaks continue to oppose any Armenian withdrawal from the seven occupied territories or the

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deployment of international peacekeepers in those territories.

Markarian dismissed the idea, however, articulated by opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosian, that President Serzh Sargsian is under international pressure to sign an agreement unfavorable to Armenia, or that the president's legitimacy is compromised. Artur Aghabekian, the Dashnak chairman of parliament's Defense and National Security Committee and a former deputy defense minister, also insisted on the need for direct NK representation in any peace talks. He also predicted that settlement is a long way off, saying that the populations of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and NK are not ready.

¶12. (U) Opposition parties have been strident as well. The parliamentary opposition Heritage Party roundly condemned the Madrid principles as the basis for an NK settlement, and threatened to lead protest marches if it were pursued. Heritage MP Zaruhi Postanjian was quoted November 16 on the popular iragir.am news website stating that Russia, the U.S., and Turkey are "competing in a race" to use the NK conflict for their own strategic interests. She argued that whichever power manages to settle NK on its own terms will be able to control the South Caucasus and deploy

troops there. Her fellow Heritage MP Anahit Bakshian told AlPlus news agency and other outlets that her party deems unacceptable "the one-sided giveaway of territories, the one-sided return of refugees, and the delay in deciding upon the status of Nagorno Karabakh." Bakshian and fellow Heritage spokesman Hovsep Kurdshian called for lands in the occupied territories to be traded for other Azerbaijani lands to be settled by Armenians, and for the right of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan to have the chance to regain possession of homes and lands in Azerbaijan, at least to be able to sell them. Stepan Demirchian, leader of the opposition People's Party and a member of Ter-Petrosian's Armenian National Congress (ANC), also criticized the Madrid principles November 14, decrying "unilateral concessions" and "surrender of territories." He also said it was necessary for NK representatives to participate in negotiating the settlement.

¶13. (U) On November 11, the newspaper 168 Zham ran an article entitled "Thinking Calmly About Ceding Karabakh?," in which former deputy defense minister and member of the ANC-member Hnchak party Vahan Shirkanian stated his concerns that if current settlement proposals, including the Moscow Declaration and the Madrid Principles, are employed, "it means that the international community plants a mine in the Caucasus that can explode at any moment." He went on to state "if the settlement happens on the basis of the current proposal, there will be a war that will be fiercer than the first one. ... It will turn the Caucasus into a region resembling the zone of the permanent Arab-Israeli conflict, which will meet the interests of the superpowers."

WHAT ARE THE GREAT POWERS UP TO?

¶14. (U) On October 28, a well-known Armenian analyst, Igor Muradian, (who is on the staff of the Presidency's in-house national security think tank, but whose views are generally his own) gave an extensive interview to the opposition-leaning Iravunk newspaper. He outlined an inflammatory "triangle of power" theory that postulated a Russian-Turkish-American confluence of interests in settling Turkish-Armenian relations and the NK dispute at the expense of Armenia's national interests. He speculated that Russia sought to improve its standing with Azerbaijan, the better to gain access and control over Azerbaijan's petroleum resources. Karen Ohanjanian of the "NKR Committee of the Helsinki Association" accused official Moscow of "intrigue" in criticizing the Moscow Declaration in a November 13 interview with the Arminfo news agency. Ohanjanian stated that "forced change...in the South Caucasus due to Russia makes (its) participation in the peace process as an impartial mediator impossible." Ohanjanian decried the lack of direct NK representation in the peace negotiations.

¶15. (U) In a November interview with the Regnum News Agency, Noravank Foundation Director Gagik Harutyunian also spoke of increasing Russian influence, while rebutting popular fears. He considered the Moscow Declaration an "important milestone" in resolving the NK conflict, and commented that "Russia's stock is rapidly rising." He added that many Armenians were fearful of a repeat of the 1920s, in which Russia and Turkey divided Armenian lands between them, but said that Armenians should no longer fear such a scenario. "Armenia is now an established state."

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THE OPTIMISTIC VIEWS

¶16. (U) The pro-governmental Hayots Askhar and Hayastani Hanrapetutyun reported on the Armenian government's

official reaction to the Moscow declaration, noting that Foreign Minister Nalbandian positively assessed on November 3 that "the meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents in Moscow was quite effective in the sense that there was substantial discussion over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement and, like the first meeting of the presidents on June 6, 2008, this meeting was also constructive." Pro-government Respublika Armenii likewise reported that Nalbandian stated that he hopes the negotiations "will open doors to a settlement of the Karabakh conflict." According to Nalbandian, the presidents instructed the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan to engage in the negotiations.

¶17. (U) Both Hayastani Hanrapetutyun and pro-opposition Haykakan Zhamanak reported that the declaration was viewed by official Baku as the "beginning of a new process." They reported on November 5 that the Head of International Relations for the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, Novruz Mamedov, stated that Baku considers the signing of the declaration by the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian Presidents an "historic moment." According to Mamedov, for the first time, a document concerning the conflict settlement has been signed by the three presidents. Aravot added that this is the first time that Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders have "jointly put pen to paper" since the signing in May 1994 of a Russian-mediated truce that stopped the war in Karabakh.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The Armenian political scene is considerably unsettled right now -- caught between rising hopes and deep-seated fears -- over the emotive issues of Turkey and Nagorno Karabakh. Facing signs of possible breakthrough on these intractable issues, many Armenians are deeply unsure whether to trust or to resist the possibility of transforming the region's geopolitical map. The status quo leaves Armenian forces in control of the strategically significant occupied territories that link them with Nagorno Karabakh. Armenians wonder what tangible benefits they will really gain from Azerbaijan in exchange for giving up these lands which were won with Armenian blood. Will Azerbaijan truly and finally give up its claims on Nagorno Karabakh in exchange, or simply pocket the half-loaf of the occupied territories, and immediately begin scheming to get back NK as well? Would the radicalized Azerbaijani society even tolerate such an outcome? Faced with such doubts, many Armenians also find themselves suspicious of ulterior motives or hidden agendas on the part of Turkey, Russia, and even the U.S. in promoting rapprochement. They fear betrayal in the furtherance of great powers' separate interests. In such a climate, the easiest course for many is hardline rhetoric.

¶19. (C) Armenians are also deeply tantalized by the possibility that the next U.S. President will proclaim the events of 1915 to have been "genocide." Intellectually, government leaders understand that the genocide issue should be a subservient foreign policy goal to more compelling present-day Armenian national interests. Still, they crave the validation that such a declaration would represent. More worryingly, too many Armenians both in government and out believe that a new Administration will recognize the "genocide" and settle all Armenia's Turkish and Azerbaijani grievances on a much more favorable basis. Faced with the uncertainties and complexities of making peace, some instead are tempted to stall for time. To do so, we fear, risks frittering away what could be a once-in-generation moment for making major progress toward transforming the regional reality for the better.

YOVANOVITCH